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DURENBERGER SEES FLOOD OF LEAKS OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION
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WASHINGTON

Sen. David Durenberger, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Friday the United States is threatened by leaks of classified information he said have reached record proportions in the Reagan administration.

"The problem of leaks is real and it stands as a threat to national security just as serious as spying against our government by a foreign power," Durenberger, R-Minn., said in remarks prepared for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Copies of the speech were released in Washington.

Durenberger said a recent leak about purported Central Intelligence Agency action to undermine Libyan strongman Moammar Khadafy "can lead to increased Libyan terrorism against Americans and U.S. interests."

And the administration's willingness to release sensitive information in an attempt to gain votes for aid to rebels in Nicaragua was only the latest "in a long series of unauthorized disclosures that have jeopardized intelligence sources and methods," he added.

The most important factor in the growth of leaks, the senator said, "is a pervasive attitude in some quarters in Washington that allows the long-term national interest to be subjugated to the opportunity for short-term political gain."

Durenberger said, "Every administration has faced the problem of leaks, but none so much as this one." Specifically, he said, since Republicans took control of the White House and the Senate in 1981, "overt use of top-secret information on Soviet treaty compliance has increased substantially."

He recalled a Nov. 6, 1985, syndicated newspaper column citing alleged difficulties in monitoring compliance with arms-control agreements. That disclosure served the interest of one administration faction as President Reagan prepared for talks with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Durenberger said.

"The overt use of leaks to discredit the verification process has no legitimate place in this crucial national debate" over arms control, he contended.

Presidential spokesman Michael Guest said Durenberger has made similar comments in the past, and "I don't think you should anticipate any comment from the White House on that."

Durenberger, whose committee has been accused by the administration of leaking, said unauthorized disclosure of sensitive information is of particular concern when deployment of counterterrorism forces is considered.

"Such disclosures can doom a rescue effort before it gets off the ground," Durenberger said. "Network news directors have recently been pressed to withhold just this kind of information which they've obtained, while the same information has been totally withheld from the Congress."

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"The cumulative impact of this misuse of leaks is to inhibit national leaders from taking measures that require secrecy for their success," he added. "This is a a terrible and intolerable outcome. An unwillingness to take risks could prove fatal in a future crisis."

Some leaks are inadvertent, Durenberger said, citing separate instances in which Reagan publicly talked of giving covert aid to rebels in Angola and Nicaragua.

But the root of the problem, the senator said, is a disrespect in government for the rules of secrecy.

"When the White House offers to release classified intelligence reports in order to sway votes in Congress, the lack of concern for sources and methods sends just the wrong message to subordinates in the administration: namely, 'You, too, may play fast and loose with security,'" Durenberger said.